



ISLAND INDEPENDENTS

PEOPLE BEFORE POLITICS

Framework For Change – Independent Priorities

May 2013

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Executive Summary

This document sets out the Island Independents Framework for Change. It provides voters in the forthcoming Council election with the information they need to understand what we propose to do and how we propose to do it if we control the Council after May 2nd.

The document is in three parts:

- Part One sets out our very different approach to local government on the Island based on transparency and inclusiveness and our own promises as Independent Councillors.
- Part Two summarises our immediate concerns and the current state of our thinking on priorities for 2013/14, but recognises the constraints that have to be taken into account.
- Part Three details the process for a comprehensive Root and Branch Review we propose undertaking throughout 2013 in order to build a new set of strategies and plans for the Island's future resting on firm foundations.

Parts Two and Three reflect further development of the Island Independents' detailed approach so we are now able to set out **what** we aspire to do in similar detail to **how** we intend the council to function.

Crucially, we consider there are significant uncertainties about the true current state of council services, as exemplified by recent revelations of serious service failings, which have come as unpleasant 'surprises'. **We are therefore led to the conclusion that a full set of strategies and detailed priorities, which are grounded in reality, must be based on an honest and thorough assessment of the current position of finances, service scope and quality of each service area. It is aspirational and to suggest otherwise is to build castles of sand.**

This is why we propose a comprehensive **root and branch review** over the next seven months and details of our proposed approach are set out in Part 3. We intend that this review should be overseen by all councillors, involve a wide range of partners and interested parties, and that the outcomes be subject to meaningful public consultation. The results of the review will be used to shape strategy and determine priorities from 2014 onwards. This means it needs to be carried out in timely manner that enables it to inform the Budget process that will be laid before Full Council for debate and agreement in February 2014.

Island Independent councillors have of course been active over the last few years in identifying immediate concerns and issues and in developing alternative budget proposals. These have resulted in a set of **Immediate Priorities** which we consider need to be tackled in 2013/14 to ensure essential services and Islanders most in need of them are protected in the short term.

We would stress that, given our new approach to decision making these will need the support of the full council but they are the agreed result of collaborative working of the Island Independent candidates.

Listed in alphabetical order, **not in order of importance**, these are our immediate priorities:

- Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing.
- Assets – Public Custodian not Private Landlord
- Assisted Area Status
- Coastal Protection
- Economic Development and Regeneration
- Education and Children's Services.
- Environment Waste and Climate Change
- Heritage and Culture
- Highways
- Public Safety
- Town & Parish Council Support and the Localism Act
- Voluntary and Third Sector Organisations
- Extending Democracy - Resident Engagement & Inclusion

Clearly, the **Financial Context** has overshadowed the running of the Isle of Wight Council for a number of years and will continue so to do. However, we are of the clear opinion that this has become the almost exclusive concern of the current administration and that their eyes have been taken off the ball in other critical areas, such as service quality, with disastrous effect.

Whilst over several years **we have not and do not propose any foreseeable increase in Council Tax**, beyond a maximum of inflation, we believe it is essential that the outlook must extend beyond cost cutting. Opportunities for obtaining additional income from European, national and other sources must and will be more actively sought, and we will concentrate rigorously on **cost effectiveness** (value of services) rather than the current obsession with **cost cutting** regardless of the impact on income and quality and the consequences for our residents.

We have the ambition, drive and energy to realize a better future for all on the Island, based on shared ideals and a pragmatic approach.

By putting **People before Politics**, we are confident that we can improve all our everyday lives, based on an open, innovative and shared approach to our future.

1. Principles and Processes

1.1. Introduction

Independent Councillors have demonstrated over the last four years that it is possible for those with different political beliefs to work together to develop and promote policies and strategies with one uniting aim. That aim is to benefit the Isle of Wight as a whole, without having to be subject to Party Political ambitions or National Party policy.

Independent led Budget proposals have proved to be lawful and balanced alternatives to the cutting agenda of the current Ruling Group. If implemented they would have prevented much of the pain and unhappiness visited on the Island over the last four years.

1.2. Our Principles and the Democratic Process

An Island Independent led Isle of Wight Council will be very different from previous councils, including those that had Independents in their number, such as Island First.

True Independents will adhere to the Bell Principles of Independent Politics and, as such, will:

- Abide wholeheartedly by the spirit and letter of the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by Lord Nolan in 1995: *selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership*
- Be guided by considered evidence, our real world experience and expertise, our constituencies and our consciences
- Be free from the control of any political party, pressure group or whip
- Be non-discriminatory, ethical and committed to pluralism
- Make decisions transparently and openly at every stage and level of the political process, enabling people to see how decisions are made and the evidence on which they are based
- Listen, consulting our communities constantly and innovatively
- Treat political opponents with courtesy and respect, challenging them when we believe they are wrong, and agreeing with them when we believe they are right
- Resist abuses of power and patronage and promote democracy at every level
- Work with other elected Independents as a Group with a chosen spokesperson
- Claim expenses, salaries and compensation openly so the public can judge the value for money of our activities.

Island Independents have worked hard to establish new rules for any future Independent controlled council. These are set out below and will guide all truly Independent councillors going forward.

Each Island Independent candidate has promised:

1. *To represent and further the best interests of my ward as a whole, being accountable only to my residents, whether they voted for me or not placing this above all other considerations.*
2. *Not to be subject to any form of whip or discipline in respect of my voting decisions.*
3. *To actively support the election of a leader of the council, cabinet members and chairs and members of committees, by the full council without any whip and work to achieve this if elected.*
4. *To actively support the establishment of working parties and select committees. This to provide truly impartial, transparent scrutiny and challenge both for policy and decision making; delegated and non-delegated.*
5. *Not to join or form any pacts or alliances with any political party or leader thereof that compromises my independence or causes me to break any of the aforementioned promises.*
6. *That if I fail to maintain my independence in this way, having been elected as an independent, I will immediately resign my seat.*

This means that where Island Independent Councillors are in the majority, Party Politics cannot take over the running of the council. **Policy will be determined through select committees and a transparent and democratic process that means all councillors are involved and proper scrutiny can be applied before decisions are made, rather than in retrospect as is currently the case.**

Under this process there will be far fewer delegated decisions and we will see an end to controversial and strategically important decisions being made behind closed doors.

However, we recognise and welcome the input of Party Political councillors of all parties and will run the Council on a consensus basis that gives everyone a say and ensures that residents are represented fairly throughout the Council. In this way we will say goodbye to the dictatorial and bureaucratic style of leadership that has characterised the current Council.

The Ruling Group, in isolation from the membership of the Council, presently decides policy. Senior officers and Cabinet Members agree on the policies and then these are presented, often as a fait accompli to the members at Full Council, having been scrutinised by panels chaired and populated by a majority of the Ruling Group. This has turned the process of putting motions before the Full Council into no more than a rubber-stamping exercise and has resulted in some of the worst decisions made by any Isle of Wight Council, in living memory.

By reintroducing an open and transparent style of local government we will change this completely and allow all members to play a part in addressing the serious problems that we face going forward. Where elected members have signed up to the Island Independents' pledge this will accordingly bring decision making closer to residents.

This change to our process is vital, as it is only by organising the Council properly that we can ensure that policy is built and decisions are taken that truly reflect the will of the people, rather than the will of the Ruling Group.

This is what it means to put People Before Politics.

1.3. The Interim Administration

Because any new system of governance that we introduce will take at least six months to implement, it will be necessary to use the existing system of cabinet and scrutiny in the interim period, to deal with priority areas. We undertake to do this in the spirit of the proposed new Independent system.

In accordance with the Island Independents' Promise, The Leader of the Council and all Cabinet Members will be elected by the full council to reflect the will of the whole Island.

The existing Cabinet Structure will be used to establish interim Committees, informal or formal depending on legal advice from Officers, under each new cabinet member.

Whilst the Leader and Cabinet Members will have the existing executive powers commensurate with the current constitution, they will engender the spirit of the proposed new structure and facilitate inclusive, open and transparent policy development within their Cabinet role and their associated committee(s).

This will ensure that the Bell principles and the promises made by Island Independents are engendered in the spirit of the interim administration.

1.4. The New Process

Any new process needs to be lawful and workable. It will be necessary to dedicate officer time to produce a new Constitution that enables the new framework to operate lawfully and effectively to translate ideas into policy and initiatives. For this reason it is not possible to provide a detailed outline of the new process here.

What we aim to develop is a process that will allow individual ward members to bring forward policy ideas and initiatives that can be discussed by the relevant committee, with input from experts and others, where appropriate.

The committee will then decide whether the matter should be investigated further or discounted, based on an open, transparent and publically visible assessment. If taken forward, the committee will investigate the matter in fine detail with the help of officers and together they will produce policy that can be placed before the Full Council and decided in an open vote. The committee will then take a scrutiny role in overseeing the implementation and the on-going progress of the policy.

This will not prevent individual members from choosing to bring matters to Full Council, but it may mean that, if agreed at Full Council, those matters are then referred back to the appropriate committee so that policy can be developed in the way described above before being brought back to Full Council for the final vote.

1.5. Summary

By the means described in this document we hope to get the Isle of Wight Council working, as it should, on an open and inclusive basis, for the Isle of Wight, its residents, businesses and visitors.

2. 2013/14 Immediate Priorities

2.1. Context

Our ability to bring forward these priorities is predicated on the assumption that Independents are able to form a majority in the next council, that the Framework for Change is implemented and that these policy proposals will be put before the whole council for discussion, debate, scrutiny, legal and professional support and decision making in the public forum of full council.

2.1.1. Council Tax

There are no plans to increase council tax beyond the levels supported by Central Government.

It is important to note that no Independent alternative budget has ever sought to raise council tax by more than any other group. There were no rises proposed in the last three years. In the first Independent alternative budget, which was a collaborative proposal made by Ian Stephens and Geoff Lumley in 2010, there was a 3% rise proposed but this was lower than the 3.4% proposed by the Conservatives.

2.1.2. Capital Programme

This is part of the Isle of Wight Council's strategic asset management and is responsible for property disposals.

We propose to halt all asset disposals that are not essential to meet our legal obligations, that is to say that they are not already contractually binding, until we have completed our root and branch review of all services and functions.

We have observed that the disposal programme implemented by the Conservative Ruling Group is not necessary to produce a balanced budget and does not change the way in which the council funds its operations.

We believe that the purpose of the asset disposal programme is political and driven by a desire to reduce the activities of the Isle of Wight Council in providing public services. This is not an objective we necessarily share, but feel that such a strategic objective should be subject to the process as outlined in the Framework for Change.

Should a future disposal be identified as appropriate the Community Right to Bid would be fully embraced and used to the advantage of local communities.

We propose prioritising opportunities for capital investment that supports the implementation of agreed policies that emerge from our root and branch review and makes the council's capital assets more sustainable.

2.2. Service Priorities

Although our root and branch review will be central to our Budget strategy going forward from 2014/15 and for the term of the new council, we are already able to provide a steer as to our immediate priorities for the following key areas:

Service Priorities:

- Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing.
- Assisted Area Status
- Coastal Protection
- Economic Development and Regeneration
- Education and Children's Services.
- Environment and Climate Change
- Heritage and Culture
- Highways
- Public Safety
- Strategic Asset Management – Public Custodian not Private Landlord
- Town & Parish Council Support and the Localism Act
- Voluntary and Third Sector Organisations

Efficiency and Effectiveness:

- Extending Democracy - Resident Engagement & Inclusion
- Training
- Information Sharing
- Expenses and Salaries

We intend to re-establish constructive partnerships with all other key agencies and offices on the Island, including our M.P., Town and Parish Councils, Health, Police and other emergency services, Business and Trades Union, and the Voluntary Sector, to ensure progress is maximised in these and other priorities identified in our root and branch review.

2.2.1. Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing.

The Challenges

The last few years have shown us just how merciless government and local authorities can be in their attempts to reduce services and save money. The elderly, the mentally ill and those with learning disabilities, as well as their families, have suffered as we have struggled to balance the books at their expense.

As a local authority we are responsible for ensuring that the disadvantaged and most vulnerable in our society are looked after and not unfairly discriminated against or damaged. The voluntary sector is an important part of supporting older people to live independently and safely at home but it should not be instead of Council led social care provision.

Social care manager posts have been reduced drastically bringing skill set losses to front line care provision and a loss of interactional contact between service users and Social Care teams. Poor service has resulted from these actions.

Personal Budget financial awards for the elderly are inadequate for the care need requirement due to complicated assessment procedures and lack of face to face meetings.

We need to ensure that all social care service users can access care provision that is safe and appropriate for the need. Unregulated care provision can be seen as a very high risk to older, vulnerable people.

Whilst changes to the systems that provide for these groups have been cast as unavoidable, we know that there have been alternatives which have been ignored and side-lined, mostly as a consequence of the way in which policy is decided under the current system. We know, for example, that other local authorities have chosen to take different policy decisions that have not led to them being challenged in the high court through costly judicial reviews.

There are some 2000 assessments including re-assessments / reviews, outstanding for care need requirements.

There are some 7000 individuals waiting on the housing list. Of these it's believed that 3000 are realistic cases, which may be judged to be serious with a smaller proportion that are urgent. With less than 350 units of new social housing proposed by the current administration, this needs to be addressed.

There are concerns about Personal Allowances for vulnerable adults with dementia or learning difficulties that cannot budget – in these cases alternatives need to be considered.

Our Priorities

We undertake to deal more compassionately with our vulnerable and disadvantaged. We do not accept that they are a drain on society and we intend to do what we can to help them to contribute to the best of their ability to a more compassionate and caring society.

We have already been successful in encouraging the Isle of Wight Council to commit to undertake an ongoing Suicide Audit, which will help us to better understand where the system is potentially failing the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our society.

We will not permit reorganisations of services to be driven purely by financial considerations. We recognise the need for continuity and that change for those suffering from a mental health issue, can be very damaging. We also recognise the negative effect that change has on the welfare of the elderly and we will look to limit the effects of any restrictions of our activities on them in this respect.

Our root and branch review will look at all aspects of health care and the public health function on the Island, together with the very real demand placed on services by an ageing population and increased demand during peak visitor times.

We propose that the Council plays a full and active part in the development of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) with the IOW Clinical Commissioning Group on the Island. This will build a profile of the Island's population and health needs which the IWCCG must provide services to meet. We will look to exploit the opportunities for improving morbidity and mortality rates by ensuring supportive policies in broader areas which are known to have a significant impact, such as housing standards and lifestyle.

Housing needs and in particular the quantity and quality of private rented accommodation in relation to standards of housing that impact on our IMD (Indices of Multiple Deprivation) statistics, will be investigated and measures sought, primarily through cooperation with landlords, to address deficiencies and raise living standards for tenants whose health is affected by damp and poor quality housing.

We propose specifically targeting those wards with the worst IMD profiles to raise standards of health, mortality and improve employment prospects and generally raise standards of living for residents.

We will work with Town & Parish Councils to help achieve these objectives.

We also propose working with GPs Health Visitors and our social work department and using our powers as a Public Health and Environmental Health authority to achieve improvement in quality of life for Island residents.

We will support the retention and where appropriate expansion of secondary (hospital) care at St.Mary's where there is a clinical case based on quality of service and resist any attempt to remove such services that is based on cost consideration alone. Where there is a necessity for patients to travel to mainland hospitals, we will work with other agencies and concerns (including ferry providers) to ensure all possible measures are taken to soften the financial, physical and emotional impact on all patients.

We propose supporting food bank schemes for those in desperate need.

We will look to support the work of the Women's Refuge and revisit research undertaken into domestic abuse and violence that was dismissed by the previous administration.

2.2.2. Assisted Area Status

The Challenge

We need to work towards assisted area status for the Isle of Wight. Our historic ties with Hampshire have seen the Island suffer when it comes to attracting inward development funding.

Attracting inward investment will strengthen the Island's economy, provide a future for our children and secure the future of the island.

Our Priorities

We will engage meaningfully and pro-actively with Central Government and the EU to achieve Assisted Area Status.

We hope to reverse the damage done to our county status by the failure of the current administration to retain the confidence of the Secretary of State for Education and bring back the Director of Children's Services from Hampshire, which we believe has taken us one step closer to being subsumed into Hampshire, which would see the Isle of Wight reduced to a borough, under the Hampshire County Council.

The root cause of our inability to achieve the necessary classification for assisted area status is our tie to Hampshire and the more affluent South East region. This masks the Island's special and unique characteristics of high levels of deprivation and poverty mixed with affluence and wealth. This makes achieve separation an important objective, with implications for other areas such as our economic development and the question of a fixed link which is always present in the background to discussions about economic viability.

2.2.3. Coastal Protection

The Challenges

The Highways PFI has become an apparent panacea for all problems. The latest proposals are to disband the Coastal Protection and Management Team and roll their functions out to other areas, such as the Highways PFI team, making redundant the Coastal Protection Manager and jeopardising our Coastal protection function.

Our Priorities

We will assess the effect of the new restructuring and repositioning of the Coastal Protection responsibilities with regard to fellow stakeholders and grant funding opportunities.

Subject to our review we support the reinstatement of the Coastal Protection Team as a vital part of the effort to control and manage our coastline and the risk of landslide that threatens many of our coastal communities.

We consider the post of Coastal Protection Manager (Principal Coastal Engineer), brings with it expertise and experience that we cannot afford to lose and will support its retention.

Through the root and branch review we will reassess the needs of this important function to ensure it is discharged appropriately and supported correctly, as well making sure it is able to engage and integrate with other services such as Planning, Environment Agency and Engineering as well as Highways.

2.2.4. Economic Development and Regeneration

The Challenges

Ensuring that existing companies and enterprises not only have a future here but seek to grow their business on the Island.

Listening to the future concerns of business owners, business managers and entrepreneurs, together with school and college students. Using this knowledge to build an Island Business Plan for the Short, Medium and Long Term.

Transport and communications - almost everything we do on our Island is reliant on lifeline ferry services. We need to engage more meaningfully with the ferry companies to help them to help us.

Our Priorities

To seek to introduce:

- Closer working relationships with the Chamber of Commerce
- Support for small businesses through start-up grants, pop-up shops and shop local schemes.
- Co-ordinated strategies to encourage local Business Associations to work with town/parish councils to support the High Street and in particular encourage independent retailers to promote uniqueness/individuality in each town.
- Initial period, free parking schemes, to encourage in-town shopping, possibly in conjunction with town and parish councils.
- Favourable terms for manufacturers and those requiring skilled workers to attract industry to the Island and make it a good place to do business.
- An Island currency to help keep money in the local economy
- Policies that will ensure local business are the first port of call for the Isle of Wight Council.
- Viable and sustainable programs to attract funding.
- Special consideration for younger and older unemployed people who find it more challenging to find work due to inexperience or their close proximity to retirement.

We will commit to actively seeking out assistance that attracts new technologies and high tech companies to the Island and investigate the feasibility of providing real incentives; not just money as has happened in the past, such as location, access, workforce and enterprise zones.

There will be a recurring theme in our policies, which will be that we will encourage officers to consider every aspect including the smallest detail, by talking to people in business, industrial and service sectors with the objective of putting in place an environment that is business friendly, in order to develop and sustain existing business and attract new business.

We plan to:

- Look for ways to market the Island as a safe, viable and profitable place to establish and grow their businesses and to live.
- Engage with all the ferry operators to secure their future commitment to links, investments, pricing and strategy. We recognise that we are all ferry users even if we do not travel on the ferries
- Deliver a sustainable link for essential (lifeline) services.
- Develop a positive working relationship with ferry providers, not just to maintain services but to grow them thus encouraging tourism and business and contributing to the overall wellbeing of the island and islanders.
- Remind operators that they are our partners and therefore we must work together to increase not just their profit but shared and sustainable benefits for both operators and users.

2.2.5 Education and Children's Services.

The Challenges

Under the current administration this area has been extremely badly neglected. The vitally important role of Director of Children's Services was marginalised and shared with the equally important role of Director of Adult Social Care, meaning that one director was responsible for two crucial directorates spreading expertise too thinly and allowing the chain of management to break down. In addition to poor political leadership, weak senior management and a failure of political scrutiny were major contributory factors in Ofsted judging the Isle of Wight Council to be providing inadequate services for the protection of children.

The process of reorganising schools on the Island has proved to be a failure for almost all our children with three secondary schools in special measures, two failing to meet the Government's target grades at GCSE. There is no other county in England and Wales that is in such difficulty and whilst things are bound to improve, like Ofsted, we must recognise the part played by the Council in allowing this to happen:

The school did not receive effective support from the local authority during the reorganization of education on the Isle of Wight. Teachers transferring from the former middle schools, and those originally employed in the high school, reported that they did not receive any training to help them prepare for their new roles or to work with students in key stages where they have no prior experience. In addition, the redeployment of staff formerly employed in middle schools together with a falling roll has resulted in significant over-staffing. This is adding to the school's current deficit budget. (HMI Ofsted Report Carisbrooke 2013)

Our Priorities

The main priority must be to support our statutory functions and schools for who we have responsibility and who are our partners in this undertaking

Child Protection Services

We propose immediately reviewing the demand, management processes and systems of work and address any deficiency in staffing levels of child social workers and their administrative support.

Failings in policy, decision-making, leadership and scrutiny that contributed to the Child Protection debacle, would be less likely to occur or prevail, under the proposals contained in the Framework for Change. The change to a committee style of governance in which expert opinion and advice can be accessed through a more inclusive style of policy making would enable all of those involved in this area to be part of the process, and help to ensure that the service was run correctly. Councillors will be expected to develop a clear understanding of what a successful service looks like and how to assess whether it is being delivered.

We would make the resources available to provide a dedicated permanent Director of Children's Services, once the period of enforced intervention by Hampshire County Council has ended.

Schools – Educational Attainment

The reorganisation resulted in all secondary schools and many primary schools being granted independence from the Local Authority in terms of management and intervention.

This limits what we can compulsorily do to improve things.

Nonetheless, the council retains a legal responsibility for ensuring a statutory education service is provided for its children and it has a role in helping to coordinate education services and identify solutions for individual schools to use to help them address the problems that they are experiencing under the new two tier system.

We also need to ensure our children are inspired to maximise their potential, including where appropriate further education off the Island.

We have identified the following areas for immediate attention ahead of our root and branch review:

1. Size of Schools

Whilst we recognise that the size of a school is not a sole determining factor in the attainment of its pupils and that other factors can play a more important role, we do feel that addressing scale issue would assist schools in achieving their objective of improving standards. This is recognised by Human Scale Education and other educationalists and there is evidence to support the theory that in some cases scale and in particular the size of year groups do have a detrimental effect on performance and the learning experience of young people. This is tied to matters related to order, discipline, learning environment and welfare. It is also supported by the work done in large private schools, which promote small scale education within a larger context.

In order to assist schools in understanding these issues, we propose to put in place funding to access the help and guidance available from organisations such as Human Scale Education, who specialise in small-scale education.

We see this as a vital contribution to raising standards. Although there is no conclusive proof that size affects the performance of individual schools there is much evidence to show that it is a factor when nothing is done to address the consequences. There is a direct correlation between the size of schools on the Isle of Wight and their results. Whether this is causal is not known but evidence from other local authorities suggests that we need to do something to address the size of our schools.

Many of our secondary schools, particularly those that are failing, are now some of the largest in the country, we would see this as a priority in addressing the problems they face.

An example of the measures that we would hope to assist with would be creating schools within schools that have proved extremely beneficial in similar situations elsewhere. It is striking that we are not the first local authority to experience these

problems and in our view most of what has happened was predictable. Indeed it was predicted. That makes the failure all the more inexcusable.

2. Absenteeism and hygiene in schools

We propose using our legal powers and powers to intervene to support schools that are contributing to the high levels of absenteeism, which in the case of secondary schools are the highest in England.

We have also identified potential issues in our schools in respect of basic hygiene and hand washing facilities leading to absence due to ill health. Through our statutory powers in Public Health and through our Environmental Health Department, we anticipate taking a far more active role in intervening in schools that are not providing adequate toilet and hand washing facilities. We will also actively encourage schools to join Bog Standard, an organisation that promotes high standards of hygiene in schools, which have been identified as a major public health issue amongst young people, affecting attendance, self esteem, physical and mental wellbeing.

We will support and encourage schools to engage in trials of free breakfasts in schools to improve attendance, working with PTAs and community partners to gain funding.

3. Governor Training

We will support and encourage schools to improve their Governor training and look at establishing a ‘Governors of Excellence’ programme that recruits those from outstanding schools to go into schools with poor performance to support the implementation of better scrutiny and management procedures.

4. School Transport

Another problematic area that will need to be addressed, within the constraints imposed on us by the current administration’s fixation with entering into poorly specified long term contracts, is the home school lift: school buses. The deficiencies in the way that this operates need to be eliminated. This is part of our aim to provide an Island-wide strategy for schools that ensures they are able to cooperate with each other in collective activities such as sports where transport is a key consideration.

We are also extremely concerned that one of the consequences of reorganisation has been to centralise education in the main towns. This means that from age 11 children are reliant on the public transport system if they engage in afterschool activities. We must take a far more proactive role in addressing the needs of children from rural communities that are off the bus routes and are isolated, particularly in the evenings. We regard this as a safeguarding priority that has been neglected over the last four years and must now be addressed.

5. Cowes Enterprise College

Our root and branch review will look into all aspects of the way our education service operates and address issues that have arisen in respect of delivery of buildings and in particular Cowes Enterprise College.

2.2.6. Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change

The Challenges

The Island faces a unique challenge amongst Unitary Authorities in England, being the only Island. Despite this it remains dependent on the mainland for power and fuel supplies, which are in turn dependent on supply lines and shipping. Even water is piped to the Island to supplement the supply sourced locally.

In our view, whilst there have been a number of significant initiatives over the last few years, we believe that the Island needs to take far more radical steps towards being self sufficient and reducing dependency on the mainland for its supply of energy and other raw materials.

We are concerned that the forthcoming Waste Disposal Contract should be genuinely able to address the issues that we face as an Island.

Our Priorities

We recognise, understand and accept the challenges of Peak Oil and will bring forward a policy with which to counter its effects in the long term.

We propose to:

- Work with and bring together eco and non-eco organisations and community interest groups to facilitate projects that benefit communities.
- Work closely with Eco-Island, Footprint Trust, Natural Enterprise, Green Towns, Transition Towns, Permaculture groups and others who are committed to addressing the issue of Peak Oil and sustainability for our Island.
- Lead by example and move towards utilising solar power and other renewables more extensively for Council properties.
- Explore micro-generation as a sensible alternative to wind turbines, looking to other local authorities and organisations that have already established their credentials with their own CHP (combined heat and power) units in towns such as Woking.
- Free up Council land for use in self-sustainability projects using permaculture and the ideas generated by the Incredibile Edibles project.
- Support sympathetic management of grounds owned by the Council for the benefit of wildlife and biodiversity, including insects and bees.

- Recognise that climate change and the need for us to be able to sustain our environment, economy and population, ultimately independently of the mainland, is a real and necessary objective that the Isle of Wight Council needs to be engaged with.
- Support the development of the IWC Waste Strategy and other waste strategies, not only public but also by working with the leading retailers that operate here, to seek to eliminate land fill and deal with packaging such as TetraPak and other similar items that are currently not capable of being recycled by this Council and are not yet dealt with by the IWC Waste Strategy.
- Actively engage with the whole retail sector to find ways to reduce, reuse and recycle waste packaging.
- Conduct a new feasibility study into the establishment of an abattoir on the Island that will reduce the need for inhumane transportation of live animals to Salisbury for slaughter and the carbon footprint of such activities.
- Support sustainable transport in the form of cycleway and footpath development.
- Investigate the possibility of introducing sustainable transport systems that could be used by businesses, residents and tourists to reduce the number of vehicles on our roads, including heavy vehicles such as coaches.

2.2.7. Heritage and Culture

The Challenges

Focus on Heritage and Culture has been sadly missing in any debate about the issues we face as an Island. This area has an obvious and important direct bearing on tourism and the economy.

Less obvious, is the sensible use of heritage and cultural facilities, both public and private, to achieve other Council objectives, in areas such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

It can also be used in the progression of economic regeneration, providing a cultural environment that is attractive to businesses looking to relocate to the Island from more urban locations.

For these reasons we need to engage more fully with the Arts Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund to explore ways in which the Islands natural beauty, culture and heritage can be used to its best advantage to compete with other areas, where such activity is already reaping rewards.

Our Priorities

We believe that we can make a positive contribution to the Island's Economy, its tourism offer and other principle objectives through the development of the Islands cultural and heritage sites.

We aim to do this by:

- Dedicating officer time to work more closely with the Arts Council and exploring Heritage Lottery funding for projects across the Island.
- Working with property owners to use empty high street shops to display artwork by individual artists, groups and schools.
- Supporting local towns to develop heritage trails.
- Reviewing and reintroducing Tourist Information Centres where these are found to be required.
- Supporting libraries, local museums, town and parish councils and other organisations to develop as community hubs and foundations for heritage and cultural knowledge.
- Working with Tourism Ambassadors, the Island's Destination Management Organisation, English Heritage, the National Trust and local Heritage Centres to assist them identify and attract Heritage and Culture tourists who provide a more year-round trade, and diversify beyond beach tourism.

2.2.8. Highways

The Challenge

Having inherited a highly controversial PFI contract we need to examine forensically the detail to ensure that contracted services are delivered on time and represent value for money.

Concerns over the even more controversial Asphalt Plant also need addressing to ensure that no residents are impacted adversely and that the environment is protected for this and future generations.

Our Priorities

We undertake to meet with the contractors to examine their ability to fulfil their contractual commitments without the requirement of their own Asphalt Plant, as the current regime insists.

We need to ensure the Council's PFI Contract Management Team have the resource and skills to manage the contract pro-actively and ensure the Island receives full value.

We propose making the key service standards including customer response standards freely accessible and available to the public.

We also propose that a programme of works (dates, places, times and schedule of works) must be produced, which can be audited and will be subject to a scrutiny process that will monitor progress against targets, quality of work, traffic and environmental impact.

Contractual defaults will be treated seriously and remedies and or compensation will be sought.

2.2.9. Public Safety

The Challenges

- The loss of the Islands Lifeguard service.
- The threat to the Island's Fire & Rescue Service from cutbacks and ill considered efficiency savings.
- High mortality and injury rates on our roads, particularly in respect of the elderly and the young
- Our relative isolation from the mainland and resources for major emergencies
- The threat to Acute Medical and Accident and Emergency facilities

Our Priorities

- Reinstate Lifeguards during summer holidays, at least.
- Review Fire and Rescue activities and look at joint working with other emergency services to ensure that we are not wasting money duplicating what is already funded and provided for by other Government Agencies
- Assess the need to 20mph speed limits in residential areas and high streets to reduce accidents.
- Work with NHS and other agencies such as Age UK to reduce the level of accidents amongst the aging population and younger drivers.
- Consider reintroducing Student Rider and work with motoring organisations and motor insurance companies to reduce the number of young people using private transport at night for recreational and social purposes.
- Focus on accident black spots and push for Island Roads to implement improvements as a matter of urgency.
- Work with Police (Safer Neighbourhoods teams) to identify trouble areas.
- We will work with our MP and Police & Crime Commissioner to investigate a possible re-naming of Hampshire Constabulary as Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary.

2.2.10. Strategic Asset Management – Public Custodian not Private Landlord

The Challenges

The Isle of Wight Council has recently adopted a stance which we believe is akin to that of a private landlord, when it is actually the public custodian for the assets it holds on behalf of the Isle of Wight and its residents.

Our Priorities

We propose acting as public custodian. The assets that we control, manage and lease will be looked after by us for the benefit of our communities, not the financial gain of the Isle of Wight Council.

This means:

- Using the Community Right to Bid to enable the community to use our buildings to regenerate their towns and parishes.
- Listening to the public and interest groups, such as the Island's metal detector groups who responsibly use our beaches for their past time and in turn work with our Heritage and museums service in finding and preserving historical artefacts.

We expect to

- Be a cooperative and helpful council. A Council that will be prepared to listen to reason and do what is right in the interests to the community we serve rather than serving our own interests
- Make more Council land available for use by community groups for the purposes of gardening and food-growing projects.
- Embrace the ideas behind "The Incredible Edibles" project to free up council controlled spaces that could be used for growing fruit and vegetables for all.
- Moving towards self-sustainability for the Island, using Council owned land to facilitate this change.
- Reinstate access to beaches and closed footpaths where possible, working in conjunction with the IOW Ramblers and others.

2.2.11. Town & Parish Council Support and the Localism Act

The Challenges

The introduction of the Localism Act brought with it many opportunities that the current Conservative Ruling Group have regarded as challenges and obstacles in achieving their objectives.

We believe that this is mostly because the Localism Act attempts to empower local people to do more in their towns, villages and localities which should be supported by the Isle of Wight Council not opposed.

Our Priorities

We undertake to support Town and Parish Councils to harness the power of the Localism Act.

In particular we will look positively at the Community Right to Bid and to Challenge for the right to provide local services and take over local buildings for the benefit of the local community.

We intend to reintroduce meaningful support for Town and Parish Councils and engage and co-operate more proactively with them.

2.2.12. Voluntary and Third Sector Organisations

The Challenges

Many voluntary organisations exist on the Island, which is a reflection of the community spirit that exists, but they may be small and poorly funded.

We need to work with these organisations and they need to work together to rise to the challenges that have arisen over the last few years through deficit reduction induced cuts to services supporting the disadvantaged.

We need to facilitate not block voluntary organisations from engaging with us so that we can help them to help society.

Our Priorities

We undertake to:

- Facilitate organisations working together on more ambitious/effective projects that complement Council services by identifying where services are required.
- Encourage people with high levels of need to integrate into the community by helping them get access to schemes that teach useful skills.
- Identify where Council funding can be used, or where grants can be applied for, to fund community improvement projects.
- Use volunteers to enhance, not replace, Council services and as such there must be acknowledgement of the skills/expertise and dedication that exist in such organisations.
- Reinstate an Officer who works solely on identifying available grants and sources of funding for community projects that enrich the social, environmental and economic quality of the Island.

2.3. Efficiency and Effectiveness

2.3.1. Extending Democracy - Resident Engagement & Inclusion

We recognise that sometimes residents do not feel that their voice is being heard and they find it difficult to get their elected representative to listen. We will investigate the possibility of devising a system through which any individual who has failed to get the support of his or her councillor or any other elected representative, for an idea or initiative, can get their idea raised formally at the Isle of Wight Council.

This might be in the form of a petition with a specified number of verifiable signatures of residents of that ward for ward specific issues, or more signatures for Island wide issues. The precise details of the numbers involved and the mechanism will need to be agreed democratically by the whole council.

This would give the public a direct say in policy development and credit those who come up with and champion good ideas.

2.3.2. Information Sharing

Residents are often shocked at how little members know about what the Local Authority is doing in their ward. Road works are usually advertised but other activities are not and it is often the residents who see the work happening, sometimes to their dissatisfaction, who then contact the ward member to complain; this being the first their Councillor knew about the matter.

We believe that this needs to be addressed and propose to alter the way in which information is shared with ward members on matters such as public works and initiatives that are undertaken by the Council in their wards, for which residents will rightly hold them politically accountable. At present this information and informal consultation is limited, patchy or non-existent.

This in our view diminishes the service provided to residents and the ability of ward members to satisfactorily represent their residents in the timely and efficient manner that their residents would expect of them. It is also responsible for much of the friction that sometimes exists between officers and members.

2.3.3. Training

We believe that training is essential to enable ward members and those with portfolio responsibilities to discharge their responsibilities in a professional and effective way. It is also important to enable members to be able to communicate and interact with professional officers in a way that is conducive to efficiently progressing the objectives of the council. We therefore propose to make far more use of the training facilities offered by the Local Government Association and others.

2.3.4. Expenses and Salaries

Finally, we are dedicated to providing residents with a Council that does not take liberties with their taxes. We are aware that a significant number of council employees are able to make purchases for amounts below £500 without explicit authority or justification. We will investigate this area and purchasing generally to ensure that budgets are better controlled and any areas of potential financial abuse are addressed.

We are also aware that residents are not content for senior officers of this authority to receive remuneration that is disproportionate to their responsibilities when compared with the more efficient public bodies elsewhere in the UK. We will investigate senior officer pay at the earliest opportunity as part of the root and branch review.

2.4. Summary

We do not underestimate or take lightly the challenges that we will face after May 2nd. We recognise the constraints that will need to be negotiated, not least our own commitment to decision making by the whole Council. However, we will not shy away from difficult decisions that will ultimately have to be made to secure a sustainable future for the Island and Islanders. We have the drive, commitment, experience and talent to succeed.

3. Root and Branch Review

3.1. Introduction

In the first year we undertake to work within the overall budget limits set by the previous council. That is not to say that we will be forced to continue with their policies or priorities. However, we need to better understand the financial context in which we will be operating. This means identifying the challenges and outlining our priorities through a root and branch review of all services.

The purpose of the proposed root and branch review is to map out a clear set of strategies, policies and plans based on a full understanding of our starting position. We do not consider it possible to ascertain a true picture of the current state of the finances, service scope and quality of council services whilst in 'opposition'. Indeed, we have significant doubts that the current administration has a grasp of this either, given the increasing frequency with which unexpected crises are occurring following external and objective assessment of a range of 'failing' council services.

We recognise that the context of this review is likely to be a challenging outlook on funding for the foreseeable future but we are determined that we will maintain our sights above and beyond an approach based purely on implementing service cuts. We will prioritise opportunities for securing additional and new funding, whether through seeking Assisted Area Status, specific Government Grants, Lottery funding or other sources.

We anticipate that much of the review will be complete within seven months of the election, allowing the outcomes to be reflected in drawing up plans for 2014/5 and thereafter. We recognise that parts of the review will take longer and may be dynamic to reflect changes and developments. The outline that follows is a draft, as it is our intention that the review, if at all possible, is 'owned' by the full Council from the outset. This is consistent with the inclusive approach set out in 'A Framework for Change'.

3.2. Scope

This review will cover all aspects of the Council's work and it will inevitably result in changes to the management structure and processes of the Council that will ensure that the democratic process is central to everything we do. The focus of the Council Members will be to set out strategy and policies and monitor progress and compliance, whilst leaving the Officers to get on with delivery.

Critically, this review will not be just about the cost of services. We are as concerned to ensure existing service scope and quality are understood and dealt with under the terms of the review. This will ensure that departmental reviews within this framework take account of all service issues such as the support provided to those operating on the front line so that they are able to do their jobs without being hindered by a lack of administrative support; in other words overall service effectiveness will be addressed.

Many of the cuts have been made from what are termed non-front line services. This misleads the public into thinking that important statutory functions are not damaged by what is being done. In reality, the cuts to administrative roles have meant that

front line staff have had to divert their time and energy to these roles, reducing their effectiveness, resulting in services that no longer do what they are supposed to do.

Our root and branch review is designed to eliminate this approach and ensure any misconceived cuts that have merely reduced service effectiveness are rectified.

3.3. Stages of the Review

We have identified three main stages of the Review:

- Diagnostic & Strategic
- Development of policies and plans
- Consultation

3.3.1. Diagnostic & Strategic Phase

- **Where are we now?**

The first stage of the diagnostic phase of the review will be essentially diagnostic, to assess the current scope, quality and cost effectiveness of each service.

- **Where should we be?**

The second stage of the review will assess the minimum level of service acceptable, based on statutory responsibilities, safety considerations, modern practice and efficient use of resource.

- **Where do we want to be?**

The third stage of the review will address where the council would ideally wish services to be positioned, again in terms of scope and quality as well as cost. This stage of the review will also take into account anticipated changes in the environment in which services are delivered, and in particular address the key challenges and opportunities that are present now or anticipated over the next few years. This will lead to the development of a new set of service strategies and policy prioritization which reflect how we would want to reshape services and their delivery over the next five years.

3.3.2. Development of Policies and Plans

From the foregoing analysis we will identify areas where there is a significant gap between the current service status, where it should be as a minimum level of acceptable service, and/or where we would want it to be.

Our plans for moving services from the current position to the proposed will be framed by the following criteria:

1. Ensuring the Council meets statutory functions fully and all services are provided safely
2. Delivering progress towards the identified strategic objectives
3. Improving the responsiveness of services to our customers: residents, businesses and visitors
4. Being a good employer of our staff
5. Improving cost effectiveness of service delivery

3.4. Consultation

Island Independents regard this review as critical to the future successful delivery of services and therefore are committed to full consultation on the outcomes. We have already begun the process of considering how we can meaningfully consult our ward constituents and other key stakeholders, including the full range of agencies, our MP, council staff and their representatives. We will need to complete the consultation exercise and formally approve the strategies, policies and plans that emerge from the review in time for detailed plans for 2014/5 to be drawn up, which will be late in 2013 / early in 2014.

3.5. Summary

Our root and branch review is not designed to apportion blame, it is to learn from the past and not make the same mistakes again. It is to ensure full accountability (past, present and future) and will ensure that all our decisions are informed and based on actual learned facts - **not** party politics.

We have outlined the process we intend to put in place to systematically assess the current state of all council services, including their scope and quality and the extent to which they are fit for purpose. We consider this necessary because we lack confidence that there is a current clear understanding.

From this base, we will develop fresh strategies and policies that will build on the action we intend to take in 2013 to address immediate concerns.

We are committed to conducting this review with broad participation and the outcomes will be subject to extensive and meaningful consultation. This will be an early test of our commitment to the principles set out in this document and we have every intention of meeting it in full.

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